

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 4874

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (CARTER, ROSALYNN)
SUBJECT: MRS. CARTER'S VISIT: BIOGRAPHIC SKETCHES

REF: STATE 104923

1. FOLLOWING ARE BIOGRAPHIC SKETCHES ON DR. RAMON ESCOVAR SALOM, FOREIGN MINISTER; DR. RUTH LERNER DE ALMEA, PRESIDENT OF THE GRAN MARISCAL DE AYACUCHO FOUNDATION; AND BLANCA RODRIGUEZ DE PEREZ, WIFE OF PRESIDENT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ. SKETCHES ON PRESIDENT PEREZ AND FORMER PRESIDENT BETANCOURT ARE BEING FORWARDED BY SEPTTEL.

2. DR. RAMON ESCOVAR SALOM, THE 50-YEAR OLD MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, HAS PROBABLY THE BEST ACADEMIC CREDENTIALS IN THE VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT. HE POSSESSES A DOCTORATE IN LAW AND POLITICAL SCIENCE FROM CARACAS' CENTRAL UNIVERSITY, AND HAS ALSO STUDIED IN FRANCE, SPAIN AND ENGLAND. HE HAS BEEN A PROFESSOR OF CONSTITUTIONAL LAW AT CENTRAL UNIVERSITY.

3. POLITICALLY ORIENTED SINCE HIS YOUTH, ESCOVAR IS VERY PROUD OF HIS ELECTION TO CONGRESS IN 1948 AT THE AGE OF 21, WHICH MADE HIM THE YOUNGEST DEPUTY IN LATIN AMERICA. AT ONE TIME A MEMBER OF ACCION DEMOCRATICA (AD), EXCOVAR IS NOW TECHNICALLY A POLITICAL INDEPENDENT. APPARENTLY THERE IS SOME RESENTMENT WITHIN THE PARTY TO THE FACT THAT ESCOVAR, ALMOST ALONE OF AD'S THEN
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LEADERS, NEVER WAS IMPRISONED OR FORCED INTO EXILE DURING THE PEREZ JIMENEZ DICTATORSHIP. NEVERTHELESS, ESCOVAR SERVED AS MINISTER OF JUSTICE UNDER FORMER PRESIDENT LEONI FOR TWO YEARS AND WAS PRESIDENT PEREZ'S SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PRESIDENCY BEFORE BEING APPOINTED MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, THE POSITION HE HAD LONG WANTED, IN JANUARY 1975.

4. ESCOVAR HAS A QUICK AND ACTIVE MIND AND A KEEN SENSE OF HUMOR. HE IS A PRODIGIOUS WORKER AND VORACIOUS READER. HE IS REMARKABLY WELL-INFORMED ON WORLD PROBLEMS AND UP-TO-DATE ON THE LATEST BOOKS AND ARTICLES ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS. HE IS A REGULAR READER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND THE ECONOMIST, AS WELL AS THE WORLD'S MAJOR NEWSPAPERS. HE IS NOT, HOWEVER, A PARTICULARLY GOOD ADMINISTRATOR, AND HIS ENERGY AND INTELLECTUAL GIFTS ARE SPENT LARGELY ON HIS OWN WRITINGS AND ON THE "BIG ISSUES". AS A RESULT HIS MINISTRY TENDS TO BE INEFFICIENT, UNCOORDINATED AND WITH LOW MORALE.

5. ALWAYS AN EAGER TRAVELER, ESCOVAR HAS ENGAGED IN CONSIDERABLE PERSONAL DIPLOMACY IN NUMEROUS TRIPS ABROAD. IN ADDITION TO ACCOMPANYING PRESIDENT PEREZ ON ALL OF HIS VISITS ABROAD, ESCOVAR HAS VISITED THE CARIBBEAN, CENTRAL AMERICA, ARGENTINA, CHILE, COLOMBIA, EUROPE AND AFRICA. ALTHOUGH THE PRESIDENT RESPECTS HIS EXPERTISE AND INTELLECTUAL GRASP OF ISSUES, ESCOVAR IS NOT CLOSE TO THE PRESIDENT AND IS NOT CONSIDERED ONE OF THE "STRONG" MEMBERS OF THE CABINET. IN INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC MATTERS, HE IS ALSO OVERSHADOWED BY BOTH MINISTER OF FINANCE, HECTOR HURTADO, AND MINISTER OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, MANUEL PEREZ GUERRERO.

6. PHILOSOPHICALLY A DEMOCRAT, EXCOVAR IS FRIENDLY TOWARD THE UNITED STATES. HE HAS BEEN OPEN WITH US AND ON MOST ISSUES GENUINELY TRIES TO BE HELPFUL. HE HAS SAID THAT HE BELIEVES A MAJOR OBJECTIVE OF VENEZUELAN FOREIGN POLICY SHOULD BE TO MAINTAIN CLOSE RELATIONS WITH THE US AND HE BELIEVES THAT PRESIDENT CARTER'S POLICIES OFFER A POLITICAL BASIS FOR SUCH CLOSE COOPERATION UNEQUALED IN A CENTURY.

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7. UNDER PRESIDENT PEREZ' TUTELAGE HE HAS BECOME A DEVOTEE OF PHYSICAL FITNESS PUTTING IN DAILY STINTS AT THE GYM IN MIRA-FLORES PALACE. EXCOVAR IS MARRIED TO THE FORMER CARMEN DELIA LEON GARMENDIA; THEY HAVE THREE DAUGHTERS (AGES 27, 23 AND 17) AND ONE SONE (AGE 26). THE ELDEST DAUGHTER AND THE SONE HAVE BECOME LAWYERS, A MATTER OF SOME PRIDE TO THEIR LAWYER FATHER. ALTHOUGH HE READS IT VERY WELL, ESCOVER SPEAKS ENGLISH HALTINGLY AND IS NOT COMFORTABLE WITH IT; HE PREFERS HIS NATIVE SPANISH.

8. RUTH LERNER DE ALMEA, THE PRESIDENT OF THE GRAN MARISCAL DE AYACUCHO FOUNDATION, VENEZUELA'S INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM, WAS BORN IN RUMANIA ON OCTOBER 6, 1926. HER FAMILY MOVED TO VENEZUELA WHEN SHE WAS FOUR YEARS OLD. SHE WENT TO TEACHERS COLLEGE IN CARACAS AND EARNED A DEGREE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION IN 1946. SHE HAS ALSO DONE GRADUATE STUDY IN FRANCE.

9. MRS. ALMEA TAUGHT HIGH SCHOOL IN VENEZUELA FOR A NUMBER OF

YEARS AS WELL AS IN EL SALVADOR AND HONDURAS (1953-5). IN 1961, SHE WAS NAMED NATIONAL SUPERVISOR OF SECONDARY EDUCATION AND WAS ACTIVE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM PROGRAMS BASED PARTLY ON HER EXPERIENCE AS A U.S. LEADER GRANTEE IN 1962. A MEMBER OF THE ACCION DEMOCRATICA (AD) PARTY, MRS. ALMEA WAS VICE-MINISTER OF EDUCATION BEFORE BEING APPOINTED TO HER PRESENT POSITION IN 1976.

10. MRS. ALMEA HAS DEVOTED HER LIFE TO HER WORK AND HAS BEEN A PIONEER IN ATTEMPTING TO REFORM THE TRADITIONAL METHODOLOGY OF VENEZUELAN EDUCATION. SHE DOES NOT SUPPORT RADICAL TEACHING TECHNIQUES BUT RATHER A COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION WHICH WILL BUILD FOR VENEZUELA THE TECHNICAL SKILLS REQUIRED FOR FUTURE GROWTH. A STAUNCH DEMOCRAT, MRS. ALMEA BELIEVES A TANDEM FUNCTION OF EDUCATION IS TO INSTILL DEMOCRATIC VALUES.

1. AN ARDENT VENEZUELAN, MRS. ALMEA HAS BEEN CRITICAL
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OF THE U.S. ON OCCASION. HOWEVER, SHE HAS BEEN FRIENDLY AND FORTHCOMING IN HER CONTACTS WITH EMBASSY OFFICIALS IN CONNECTION WITH GRAN MARISCAL DE AYACUCHO SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM. A CLOSE FRIEND OF FORMER PRESIDENT AND MRS. BETANCOURT, MRS. ALMEA VIRTUALLY WORSHIPS THE EX-PRESIDENT. MRS. ALMEA, WHILE NOT POLITICALLY AMBITIOUS, HAS BEEN A PARTY STALWART. SHE HAS EXPRESSED THE DESIRE, HOWEVER, TO RETIRE FROM PUBLIC LIFE AFTER NEARLY 30 YEARS.

12. ALTHOUGH SHORT, ABOUT 5 FT 3 INCHES, AND SLIGHTLY PLUMP, MRS. ALMEA IS ALWAYS WELL-DRESSED AND ATTRACTIVE. A WOMAN OF GREAT VITALITY, MRS. ALMEA COMES ACROSS AS A FORCEFUL PERSON. SHE IS INTELLIGENT AND CONSIDERED AN HONES, SKILLED AND HARD-WORKING ADMINISTRATOR. MRS. ALMEA IS RESPECTED BY FELLOW EDUCATORS AND HAS A MEASURE OF INFLUENCE AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE AD PARTY. PERHAPS A BIT STAND-OFFISH AT FIRST, SHE WARMS EASILY AND RESPONDS TO SINCERE INTEREST IN HER WORK.

13. MRS. ALMEA IS MARRIED TO MR. JOSE ALMEA, WHO IS ALSO AN EDUCATOR. THEY HAVE TWO DAUGHTERS. MRS. ALMEA'S SISTER, ELISA, HAS STUDIED AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY. IN ADDITION TO SPANISH, MRS. ALMEA SPEAKS REASONABLE ENGLISH, SOME FRENCH AND A BIT OF GERMAM. OF JEWISH EXTRACTION, SHE CAN ALSO SPEAK YIDDISH.

14. BLANCA RODRIGUEZ DE PEREZ (FREQUENTLY CALLED DONA BLANQUITA), 57 YEARS OLD, WIFE OF PRESIDENT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ, IS A SHORT, CHUBBY WOMAN WITH LARGE, EXPRESSIVE BLACK EYES. SHE IS A WARM, RATHER SHY PERSON, WHO DID NOT APPEAR IN PUBLIC LIFE UNTIL THE 1973 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN. HER QUIET ALMOST GENTLE MANNER CONCEALS A STRONG WILL AND SHE IS A STRONG PERSON. HER SHYNESS MAKES HER RETICENT WITH PEOPLE SHE MEETS FOR THE FIRST

TIME, BUT SHE IS QUICK, OBSERVANT AND STRAIGHTFORWARD.

15. MRS. PEREZ PRIMARY INTEREST ARE CENTERED UPON HER FAMILY. SHE AND CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ ARE COUSINS; THEY WERE MARRIED IN 1948. SHE HAS FAITHFULLY FOLLOWED HER HUSBAND THROUGH THE
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VICISSITUDES OF HIS CAREER, INCLUDING THE DIFFICULT YEARS OF POLITICAL EXILE, AND HER CONSUMING INTEREST WAS TO BRING UP THEIR SIX CHILDREN, NOW RANGING IN AGE FROM 13 TO 26--SONIA, THAIS, MARTA (MARRIED), CARLOS MANUEL, MARIA DE LOS ANGELES, AND CAROLINA. AS SHE HERSELF TELLS THE STORY, WHEN HER HUSBANDS NEEDED HER TO APPEAR IN PUBLIC LIFE WHEN HE RAN FOR PRESIDENT, SHE AGREED TO JOIN HIM AFTER EXTRACTING THE PROMISE THAT HE WOULD KEEP ALL OF HIS PROMISES TO THE HUMBLE PEOPLE, AND THAT SHE WOULD BE ALLOWED AN OFFICE AND GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE TO HELP MOTHERS AND CHILDREN IN VENEZUELA. HER CONSUMING INTEREST SINCE BECOMING FIRST LADY HAS BEEN TO DEVELOP A DAY CARE PLAN FOR CHILDREN WHOSE MOTHERS NEEDED TO WORK. SHE HAS DEVELOPED A SERIES OF CENTERS INVOLVING THE CARE OF CHILDREN BY WOMEN WILLING TO TAKE THEM INTO THEIR OWN HOMES IN RETURN FOR ASSISTANCE IN FIXING UP THE HOMES AND SMALL PAYMENTS. THIS PLAN IS BEING CARRIED OUT THROUGH THE VENEZUELAN CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION (FUNDACION DEL NINO).

16. SINCE HER HUSBAND BECAME PRESIDENT, MRS. PEREZ HAS ACCOMPANIED HIM ON MANY OF HIS TRIPS AROUND VENEZUELA AND ON HIS TRIPS ABROAD. THEIR ELDEST DAUGHTER, SONIA, WAS VERY RECENTLY NAMED HEAD OF FUNDACOMUN, A VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY.
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